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Swoop and Dive

By Morrie Mullins

Kerd K'Kerren, a famous swoop racer, arrives in Cularin. "It's, you know, something to do that's not war. And Cularin's someplace to, you know, do it. Good place to be, right?" For once, Yara Grugara may have met her match in an interview. This Living Force supplement ties in to the scenario "Cloak and Vebroblader."

Hello, friends. This is Yara Grugara, reporting for Cularin Central Broadcasting. Over the past few months, Yara has done a lot of very serious pieces for the network. That's good. Serious is good. Because the galaxy is a serious place, and Yara is a serious woman. But there is a time and a place for seriousness, and if anyone knows that you can't be serious all the time, it's Yara. Plus, her producers seem to think Yara is getting a little bit self-important. What do they know, though? If they were so brilliant, they would be in front of the holorecorders.

So today, Yara has scheduled an interview with a newcomer to the Cularin system, a gentleman named Kerd K'Kerren. Many of you may be familiar with Kerd's daring exploits. From his humble beginnings as a Podracer in the Outer Rim, Kerd has traveled the galaxy. He's flown for every major race team, from SoroSuub to the Hutt Racing Program, and has turned down more sponsorships than Master Lanius has turned down interview requests from yours truly - - which says something. He's won races on Tatooine, Coruscant, and over three dozen other worlds, and has never finished lower than second when his racer hasn't experienced "mechanical problems." Now he's come to Cularin, and it's Yara's duty to find out why. Welcome to the studio, Kerd K'Kerren.

There is a smattering of applause from off-camera, sounding like it comes from stage hands and other minor functionaries on the CCB set. As the applause dies down, a young man saunters onto the set and grins in the direction of the camera. He wears a skin-tight suit of rancor hide trimmed with white and brown fur. Enormous black boots rise to mid-thigh, where they seem to be strapped in place with steel bands. The only flesh visible on his body is on his hands, neck, and face, and every inch of skin is covered in intricate green and gold tattoos, including the left side of his head, which is completely shaved and tattooed with swirls and checks. The right side of his head seems to have sprouted a shock of hair the color and texture of late summer grass. A single horn - - very much like an Iktotchi's - - curves down from his left temple and ends inches from his mouth. A small microphone is mounted on the tip of the horn, which clearly isn't something he was born with, but is just as clearly permanently attached to his head. He turns toward one of the cameras that isn't currently active, spreads his arms, and grins.

Kerd: Hello, Koooooooooooo-larin!

Yara: Kerd? That camera.

She points. Kerd turns toward the camera that's active, grins even more broadly, and spreads his arms again.

Kerd: Welcome to Kooooooooo-larin!

Yara: I think that's my line, Kerd.

Kerd sits. He shimmies in his seat, seeming to dance to music that only he hears, then reaches up and adjusts the mic on the end of his horn.

Kerd: Nah. It's mine. No doubt about it. Welcome to Kooooooooo-larin! Got a nice ring to it, don't you think?

Yara: Except for the fact that it's pronounced kew-lar-in, not koo-lar-in, I suppose it does.

Kerd: I scoff. Hah! Wanna see?

He twists his face into a half-smirk, pulling the left side of his upper lip almost all the way up to his nose and squinting his right eye most of the way shut.

Kerd: That's scoffing, sweetmeat.

Yara: Excuse me?

Kerd: Scoffing. You know, expressing derision, in this case for information I really didn't want or need. Like, how to mispronounce Kooooooooo-larin, when it's so much, well, cooler to pronounce it the way the Kerd-man does! You know, you're kind of hot. What's your number?

Yara: "The Kerd-man"? You can't be serious.

Kerd: Nah. You've seen my scoffing face. That wasn't it. I'm all serious now. This is the Kerd-man, and you're all welcome to Kooooooooo-larin! You may have called it something else before, but now that I'm here - - it's just that much kooooooooo-ler!

Yara licks her lips, adjusts the notes in front of her, and forces a smile.

Yara: We were rather like backwater savages before you arrived, Kerd-man. Can I call you Kerd-man?

Kerd: You bet. What's your number?

Yara: So tell me, Kerd-man, what is it that brought you to Cularin?

Kerd: Well, I'll tell you, sweetmeat - -

Yara: Sorry. Sorry to interrupt. Would you please not refer to Yara in that manner? It makes her uncomfortable.

Kerd: Shyeah. Sure. Who's Yara, and what should I call her instead?

Yara: I am Yara, you - - I mean, I'm Yara. And you can call me Yara.

Kerd: Cool. Where can I call you?

Yara: You were going to tell me what it is that brought the Kerd-man to Cularin.

Kerd: Whoa. Denied. Right, so why is the Kerd-man here? A couple reasons. One, I heard that Kooooooooo-larin's got some eye-twisting Podrace action going on, with big sponsorship opportunities. You got your little-people Cartel, and that's nice. It's good to give funny-looking types something to do every once in a while, so throw the little guys a bone. That's what I always say. So they got control of your trade, and that's all special and stuff. Good deal. But they also got a lot of credits, which is, like, way beyond what you ought to do for little folks like that. Because they don't know what to do with it. But then they, like, go out and build Podrace tracks, and things get wild. So, that's cool.

Yara: I don't think I understood a word you just said.

Kerd: You're not very bright, are you?

Yara: At least I can count to two. That wasn't two reasons why you came to Cularin. It was either one, or eleven. But it wasn't two.

Kerd: Heh. Whoa. Okay, it can't be eleven, since you've still got your shoes on, so the counting can't have got that high. So it must be one. Which I guess means the other reason the Kerd-man came to Kooooooooo-larin is this war thing. You heard about that?

Yara: Yes, we're aware of it.

Kerd: It make you nervous?

Yara: I think wars make everyone nervous.

Kerd: Ever want to find a man to cuddle up with and make all the scariness go away?

Yara (deep breath): First, "nervous" and "scared" aren't the same thing. Second - - sure. We all need to be held.

Kerd (grinning): You need a man. What's your number?

Yara (too sweetly): I'll give it to the first real man I meet.

Kerd: Whoa. Denied again.

Yara: So, you're here in Cularin to hide from the war. How heroic of you.

Kerd: Hey, now. The Kerd-man's a pilot, not a warrior. You ever see what's left of a ship after it gets unloaded on with a bunch of fire-linked

turbolasers, maybe some photon torpedoes? I tell you, s'not much. Just little bits of dust and scraps of metal and goop that kind of heads off into space until it hits something with an atmosphere and burns up, and that's the end of it, nothing left of you but whatever hasn't hit an atmosphere yet, but the galaxy's only so big, and sooner or later, all your little goopy bits are gonna hit something or another. Nah, Kerd-man just flies the Pods. That's all he wants and all he needs.

Yara: I see from your list of sponsors that you once flew for the Hutts. What was that like?

Kerd: Oh, sweet little baby, let me tell you! You've never flown until you've flown Hutt Air! It's like, they bring you in and say, "Oota goota boota froota," and you're like, "Huh?" and they're like, "Oota goota boota froota." And you're like, "Um, okay." And then there's all these hot femmes around, and most of them even have all their pieces still, and you got the hottest ship in the galaxy, and the guys that are working on it used to work at places like Sluis Van until they got picked up in the wrong place at the wrong time and started working for the Hutts to pay off some debts. So everything you want's right there.

Yara: Was there a particular Hutt you flew for?

Kerd: Nah. It's not like that. Jabba and me talked a few times, but can I tell you something?

Yara (deadpan): I'm breathless with anticipation.

Kerd: That guy's gross! I'm standing there talking to him and he picks up this slimy critter with long, floppy legs out of a vat by his little podium or whatever it is he sits on. Then he pops it in his mouth, but he's so fat, he can't even close his mouth fast, so the thing about crawls out before Jabba's mouth pops down and splat! I got reptile guts all down my shirt, and one of the thing's legs is stuck to the ceiling.

Yara: Fascinating. So I understand that you've never come in lower than second in any race where you haven't experienced technical malfunctions. True?

Kerd: You best believe. I fly like nobody's business. Nobody outflies Kerd K'Kerren. Nobody! This one time, on Tatooine, there was this little kid who took out Sebulba in a race. Just a runty guy, and Sebulba - - well, he used to be pretty cool. And everybody made a big deal about this kid. I don't even remember his name. He doesn't race any more - - one of those child-star types. He's probably in some gutter on some nowhere world now, sucking on his last deathstick. It always happens. Anyway, this kid, he just ran Sebulba over, and everyone was like, Man, this kid is great. But what no one knows is, I was scheduled to race that day. Just didn't. Had engine trouble. Some droid dropped a hydrospanner in my outflow. So I didn't race, Sebulba lost, and nobody knows I would've won.

The?runty guy? at home.

Yara: So you have a lot of technical malfunctions, then?

Kerd: A lot? I don't know about a lot. Everybody has some. It's racing.

Yara: Right. I have some statistics. I'm going to share them with our viewers at home. It looks like you've entered over 700 races in the past decade. Does that sound about right?

Kerd: Yeah, I guess. Give or take.

Yara: Of those 700, you've won 50, and come in second in another 82. That sound right?

Kerd: You better believe it, beautiful. You're looking at a top-shelf winner. None better. You know you want to give the Kerd-man your number. Right?

Yara: Funny you should mention numbers, Kerd-man. Because based on what I just said, you've come in first or second in 132 races out of around 700 you've entered.

Kerd: Yeah. So?

Yara: So you also told us that every race in which you haven't come in first or second, it's been because of mechanical problems.

Kerd (finally catching on): Yeah?

Yara: Oh, it just seems like 568 mechanical problems is a lot, that's all. You ever consider getting a new mechanic?

Kerd: The Kerd-man does all his own work!

Yara: Right. Like I said, you ever consider getting a new mechanic?

Kerd: Hey, the Kerd-man doesn't have to sit here and take this abuse - - not when the Kerd-man's finally here in Koooooooo-larin! Everything's different now, people. Welcome to Koooooooo-larin! Welcome to Koooooooo-larin! The Kerd-man's here! Welcome to Koooooooooooo - -

The screen goes blank. We hear "larin!" followed by a sharp smack and an indignant "Ow!" Silence. Then Yara appears. She's on a different set, dressed differently, and her smile is no longer quite so forced.

There you have it, race fans. Kerd K'Kerren has come to Cularin. Recent reports indicate that he's looking to obtain the sponsorship of the Metatheran Cartel. Until such time as a major Podrace occurs, though, when we can all see the Kerd-man's mechanical skills in action, you can find him at this address.

An address for a hotel on Tolea Biqua scrolls across the bottom of the screen.

And on behalf of everyone in the system, I suppose it's kind of my duty. So, Kerd-man, welcome to Cularin. May your stay be as long as it has to be.